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## LIMITED DEPARTMENTALIZATION GRADES III-VI

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Departmentalization in grades below the high school met with opposition from conscientious objectors. In spite of this, it has been generally adopted for the seventh and eighth grades. Now the movement to extend the advantages of the system to grades below the seventh brings forth like protests. No one will deny that a system which gives children the inspiration of teaching by a person who thoroughly understands and loves the subject in which he is giving instruction has strong points in its favor.

On the other hand, it is argued that the personal touch, the personal responsibility of a teacher to her grade, outweighs the advantages of specialization. People taking this view assert that the child needs the continued interest of the teacher more than he needs the subject-matter and that the influence of a teacher's personality is the big factor of education.

Arguments of the type referred to in the last paragraph are no longer accepted as applying to the seventh and eighth grades. Saner minds realize that the purpose of schools is to educate, not to influence by osmosis. Were the arguments well founded, the natural result would be to keep all the children at home where the personality factor is strongest.

In the Webster School of Fresno, California, we have tried the experiment of departmentalizing the third to sixth grades inclusive. We had all the arguments against doing this advanced during the first year by both teachers and parents. Both groups are much alike; both object to being jarred out of

the established order of things. Now, in the third year of what has ceased to be an experiment, the dubious chorus of the teachers has become a boosters' jubilee, while the parental opposition has died away to a satisfied silence.

We recognized that some of the arguments had a particular force in reference to the lower grades. We were willing to admit that third-grade children might become confused by having many different teachers. All the disadvantages were weighed carefully before it was decided to try the plan.

Other systems were studied. Some of these might be called "trading" schools. A teacher who does not like music trades with one who does and receives in return a subject she likes better, though it may be one for which she has no natural aptitude. Poor as it is, this system is better than the plan which calls on every one in the school to pose as an "all-round" teacher in an age when specialization is the mark of progress.

The Webster plan is a limited one. It recognizes the fact that in every group of teachers there are some with special qualifications for really teaching some subjects. At the same time it does not overlook the importance of personal influence. It is not a theory, but the practical result of four semesters of experiment. The fifth semester finds the plan perfected in the earlier periods in full operation. This does not necessarily mean that those interested have branded it as perfect, but that it is approaching stability.

The departmental work includes what we call, for want of a better word, the art subjects: music, drawing, primary manual training, play, language, sewing, penmanship, and geography. Some readers will take issue with this classification. Geography may look strange when classified as an art, but when one sees the subject correctly taught he acquiesces in the classification.

The three fundamental subjects were designated as regular because we wanted the class teacher to have several periods

in which to make the children feel that someone had a strong interest in them and a control over them. Arithmetic is one of these because it is more nearly an exact science than any of the others; reading, because it is merely the development of a taste for the printed page; and spelling, because it is just beginning to get out of the "shaggy-coat" class and is not yet well enough groomed to be admitted to the elect.

We tried specialized work at various points during the day. Our present hours we consider best suited to our purpose. From nine to ten-thirty the home teacher has the class. Arithmetic and spelling are recommended for this period, with five minutes of physical exercise at ten o'clock. A recess of fifteen minutes brings us to the departmental work. There are three twenty-five minute periods before noon and three after one o'clock. Then comes another recess of fifteen minutes, after which the class teacher goes back to her room for the last hour. This period is usually given to reading. Reading may be a number of things, but we try to keep it as far removed as possible from the old method of reading a paragraph and keeping a finger on the place.

Pupils do not go from room to room at the Webster School. This plan was tried and discarded for various reasons: different-sized desks made it difficult, there was much confusion and loss of time in the moving, and pupils returning to looted desks made an unwelcome, though just, remonstrance. The teachers go from room to room without these annoyances.

The reproduction of our program would be needlessly confusing. A study of our time schedule for each subject will be more illuminating. Each week has thirty periods divided as follows:

Periods	
Geography.....	5
Music.....	5
Play.....	4

	Periods
Drawing . . . . .	2 (These come in succession)
Primary Manual	
Training <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	2 (These come in succession)
Penmanship . . . . .	2
Language <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	8
Hygiene . . . . .	1
Culture Reading . . . . .	1

Language is put down for eight periods. As we take unheard of liberties with this study, an explanation is necessary. We separate the subject into its branches and assign the parts to different teachers. There are four branches or subdivisions: dramatization, letter-writing, oral language, and written reproduction.

It is a well-founded criticism that pupils spend three-fourths of their time in school learning to write sentences on a blackboard and paper when the practical use of the education will be nine-tenths oral. In consideration of such necessity the Webster plan makes at least half the language work oral. Two periods are given to written reproduction, which includes reproducing stories, taking dictation, filling blanks, or whatever the teacher feels is needed; one period is given to letter-writing; one of the periods of dramatization may be written if the teacher so desires it.

It is the simple, friendly letter, the business letter, the invitation and its reply, that concern ninety-nine out of the hundred public-school graduates. For most people that is the total use to which they put their knowledge of written English. One period a week for the three years on this important subject makes it certain that pupils leaving school will have the subject well impressed upon their inner consciousness. They study form, content, punctuation, and the addressing of envelopes.

<sup>1</sup> In the sixth grade primary manual training periods are given to sewing for the girls and manual training for the boys. In this grade, also, one of the language periods is given to history.

Dramatization as a branch of language has been the writer's hobby for the past ten years. It is with satisfaction that he has watched the increasing attention paid to it. In the program of the Webster School three periods a week are given to it. If at first glance this seems a disproportionate amount of time, the answer is that results justify it. When a person walks into a room and sees a class play a story, views children of all ages standing self-possessed before an audience, hears them talk fluently in character, he must feel that the time is well spent. The children play the story without notes, and the speeches are made up as the spirit moves. It makes for the cultivation of expression and the ability to think on one's feet. Members of a dramatization class do not, when spoken to at a gathering, stick a tongue in cheek and make toe patterns on the carpet.

The oral-language periods, two in number, are given to the telling of stories, making reports from magazines and newspapers, debating, and kindred exercises. Once more it is the training of the mind to act quickly that makes this work valuable.

With the time schedule worked out, building a program is not difficult. Language offers some difficulties of assignment. In the beginning the teachers found continuous dramatization periods irksome. This was principally because it is difficult to find material for the stories of action. Later, when both teacher and pupil became acquainted with the work, these classes became a pleasure. With the stories catalogued and with the disappearance of the child who cannot do anything, these adventures into the land of make-believe have become wonderfully entertaining. The meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association are enlivened by examples from these classes.

Naturally there will be objections to any system. Most of these objections, however, disappear after the system is given

time to adjust itself. At first the teachers reported that the discipline was much harder. As the months went on, this complaint almost died away. What happened was that the teacher became enthusiastic about her subject and the pupils forgot to be noisy in sharing that feeling. Another complaint was that this form of intensive work was hard on the teacher. This criticism also died away when the teachers began to store up an immense quantity of material. They turned out so much better work and so much more of it that the results inspired them. They began to wish for more time in which to develop their subjects.

This, then, is our plan of departmentalization. It started as an experiment. Since we regard it no longer as such, we offer a description to others, confident that it is an improvement on the usual plan of undepartmentalized teaching.